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SECRETARY

CLASSICAL ART

Second Fifth Century Room

C-6

Bronzes, Marbles, and Terracottas

The second half of the fifth century B. C. is the period to which the Greeks later looked back as the time of their greatest glory. During most of these fifty years Athens was the dominant state, and at Athens the most remarkable monuments are preserved in the four great buildings on the Acropolis -- the Parthenon, the Erechtheum, the Propylea, and the little temple of Athena Nike, popularly called the Temple of Wingless Victory. In sculpture the great names are those of Phidias, who dominated the Attic School until his death in the thirties, and Polyclitus, who was the acknowledged head of the school of Argos. This was the great age of idealism when the sculptors, now absolute masters of their art, strove to embody in bronze and stone their highest ideals of human beauty. The products of the men who made small things, vases and terracottas, coins and gems, sometimes rivalled the creations of the sculptors, but in general these minor artists lagged behind, partly, no doubt, because the lofty conceptions of the age were hard to embody in work on a small scale. Conservatism, too, played a part, and in coins, especially, archaic mannerisms lingered on in many places until the last two decades of the century.

Of the monuments displayed in the Second Fifth Century Room, the statue of Aphrodite best embodies the spirit of the age. Though this is not an original work, but an adaptation made in Roman times of a famous statue, it is the work of a skillful Greek master, and the Pentelic marble has taken on the beautiful warm patina which that marble gradually acquires. It is thus well fitted to suggest what the great works of the period were like. The pose is that most common for standing figures, with all the weight on one leg, and the other set at the side and bent at the knee. This produces a feeling of stability, but results in marked differences in the development of the drapery on the two sides of the body. The sturdy proportions, too, with wide waist and broad shoulders, are characteristic of the time. And the rendering of the

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Praxiteles, Apollonius, and Polycleitus

linen chiton as thin and almost transparent is one of the striking new developments, which is first seen in a few figures from the pediments of the Parthenon (carved in the thirties of the fifth century), and which grew in popularity in the later years. Many other copies of this type of Aphrodite are preserved -- a fact which proves the fame of the original. Other copies show that in the original work the right hand was raised and held a corner of the heavy outer garment, and the left hand was extended and held an apple. That original is almost universally regarded as the work of one of the immediate pupils of Phidias, datable about 420 B. C.

The two grave monuments also illustrate the tendencies of the time. One has the normal form of the stele, with the architectural framework which came into use in the fifth century. Here it has the form of two Doric pilasters crowned by an imitation pediment with acroteria in the form of palmettes at the peak of the gable and at the corners. The other is in the form of a lekythos, a type first developed in this period. It is, no doubt, explained by the fact that during the second half of the fifth century the clay lekythoi became the popular type of vase for offerings to the dead. In both types what is most striking is the marked idealization of the human figures. They almost never display any tendency to portraiture or to the suggestion of individual traits; and there is no reference to death. The men and women are represented in their prime, engaged in some simple occupation of daily life. So, on our stele, the girl is represented at her toilet, looking into a mirror, and on the lekythos, the seated woman is similarly occupied; she looks into her mirror, while a servant stands before her with an open jewel box. Is there, perhaps, a reference to the last journey, as some critics have argued? Possibly; but other grave monuments, for which such an interpretation is impossible, make the theory unlikely.

The ram's head, which probably was part of a life-sized figure, is interesting, not only for its complete freedom from archaic mannerisms, but for the hollow eye-sockets; the

eyes must have been naturalistically rendered in colored material and so suggest that color continued to be applied to marble sculpture.

Three marble heads, displayed in Case 1, are good examples of fifth-century style. All are carved in Pentelic marble and so, presumably, are works of the Attic School. The most interesting in some ways is the head with the large helmet, since this very probably came from the frieze of the Temple of Wingless Victory, on which a battle of Greeks and Persians was represented. Size, height of relief, and simplicity of rendering are strong arguments for such a theory. The second helmeted head, in spite of its small size, probably came from the pediment of a temple. Crest and cheek-pieces of the helmet were worked out separately and added, probably in marble, if one may judge from the large size of the holes for their attachment. Again the simplicity of the modelling is noteworthy. This is true also of the small female head from a small statuette. Though the hair was only roughly worked, it is clear that all traces of the pattern-like treatment of early times is gone.

A comparison of the bronzes in Case 1 with those exhibited in the First Fifth Century Room will also emphasize the advances made in the second half of the century. The large oinochoe with the bust of a woman and a sphinx as handle-ornaments still preserves something of the formality of archaic art and perhaps should be dated before, rather than after, 450 B. C.

The statuette of Athena reflects the ideals of the fifth century in its pose and in the broad treatment of the folds of the Doric chiton; the aegis, with its gorgon's head and border of serpents draped across the breast, is a regular feature of Athena's panoply. In the boy, who raises his right hand to his forehead, the simplification of the period is seen in an exaggerated form; no folds are represented in the chlamys, which is his only garment. The gesture is one of prayer. The boy with his right hand raised probably was also a praying figure. The girl who holds a dove in her right hand may be making an offering at a shrine (of Aphrodite?), and the satyr is probably performing

one of those slow dances, with carefully prescribed gestures, which are frequently represented on the painted vases. In all these figures the broad general treatment of the surfaces and the absence of individual traits are characteristic of the art of the great age. The small bronze vessels, with their carefully planned decoration, speak for themselves.

Finally, the gold earring is one of the finest examples of the goldsmith's art that has survived from antiquity. Even though it is made of thin sheets of gold, it seems too elaborate for everyday use, and the theory that it formed part of a statue of gold and ivory, like Phidias' Athena at Athens and his Zeus at Olympia, has much in its favor. Victory driving a chariot is a type which is first found on monuments of the latter part of the fifth century.

Greek Terracottas from South Italy

In Greece itself, comparatively few terracotta figurines dating from the great period of the fifth century and reflecting the style of Phidias and his contemporaries have been found. At Tarentum and on the sites of other Greek cities in South Italy, on the other hand, many terracotta figures of large size have been found, which definitely recall the style of the great fifth century sculptors. The conditions under which they were discovered show that they were for the most part votive offerings at temples, although some have been found in tombs.

Just why there should have been such a difference in the development of work in terracotta in the two regions is an unsolved problem, but one element was understandably the lack of deposits of marble in southern Italy. This may account, also, for the fact that in the South Italian terracottas, although moulds were used, the makers added many details freehand -- locks of hair and beards, fillets, and other features -- a process which gives much more individual character to their products than is shown by the highly idealized and rather monotonous types of the

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mainland. This is obvious in several of the bearded male heads of which examples are exhibited in Case 6. The type is identified as that of Dionysos Chthonios, that is, of Dionysos as a god of the Lower World. The male flute-player on shelf 1 is no doubt an attendant of the god. The female figure holding a raised spear, with a quiver hanging on a tree in the background, is, perhaps, Artemis. An unusual type is the girl, beside whom a small Eros is modelled as if he were whispering to her. The introduction of background of this sort is another unusual feature of the South Italian terracottas.

Some of the other heads probably were intended to represent divinities, but in the absence of attributes, identification is impossible. The finely modelled female mask on shelf 3 has been plausibly identified as that of Persephone. It is, in any case, one of the best reflections that we have of the grand manner in fifth century sculpture.

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